

Janet T. Mills
Governor

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Dear Families:

During the initial months of the pandemic, many children missed their regularly scheduled medical appointments. Children coming into foster care are often due for their well child visits and preventive care, such as immunizations. It is important that we ensure children are getting back to medical offices to get their appointments and immunizations, and that their health needs can be addressed. Medical offices are taking steps to make sure that it is as safe as possible for office visits that need to happen in-person, as well as offering many services through telehealth.

It is crucial for the health and safety of the children in your care that you contact the office of your child's Primary Care Provider (PCP) and schedule their next appointment. Well child visits and acute visits for any concerns should continue.

On March 16, Governor Mills issued order that lifted the requirement that child be seen for their initial medical appointment within 10 days of entering foster care. We still recommend that children have this initial appointment, as this visit is essential to establishing care with the child's medical home and addressing urgent needs. The Governor's order allows for more time to get this visit scheduled. Please work with the child's case worker to get this initial visit scheduled at the child's PCP - which may be at a pediatric or family practice office.

Many medical offices are offering appointment in-person and through telehealth. There may be urgent issues that can be managed by telehealth. Some offices are offering part of the visit by telehealth and then procedures such as immunizations and labs and vital signs can be done in person at a separate time.

For newborns, the appointments should occur, in-person, as soon as the infant comes into custody. When an infant is discharged from the hospital, please follow the hospital instructions for when the newborn to be seen again, usually within 1-2 days of hospital discharge.

For infants, toddlers, and preschoolers the initial medical appointment should be in-person, as it is important to have a physical exam, and for the provider to determine if any immunizations are due.

For school age children, including teenagers, please call the provider to determine if any immunizations are due urgently, and ask for an initial medical appointment in person when possible.

Ideally, Comprehensive Health Assessments or evaluations should be held for children within one month of entering care. These evaluations are important to address the complex medical, developmental and behavioral needs of the children. The comprehensive evaluations are separate from the well child visits. This process is still challenging and currently these visits are being held by telehealth at this time. Resource families will be contacted by staff from the Pediatric Rapid Evaluation Program (PREP) clinic in Portland, Lewiston or Augusta, or from the Key Clinic in Bangor to schedule these appointments.

In addition to the Initial Medical Appointment and the Comprehensive Health Assessment, all children should have their well child check visits according to the recommended schedule beginning at the newborn follow up after discharge from the hospital, then at 2 weeks, 1 month, 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 9 months, 12 months, 15 months, 18 months, 24 months, 30 months, and then annually, from 3 years of age. Please contact the child's PCP to get the next well child visit scheduled. Many offices are arranging for children to get caught up on the immunizations that were missed and are needed for the start of school.

Dental offices are also now rescheduling patients that had to be cancelled. All children should have their care with a dental provider beginning at 12 months of age.

The following links offer helpful information:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/adoption-and-foster-care/Pages/Caring-for-Children-in-Foster-Care-During-COVID-19.aspx>
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Is-it-OK-to-call-the-pediatrician-during-COVID-19-even-if-Im-not-sure-my-child-is-sick.aspx>
<https://www.maineaap.org/families/resources/foster-care>

We appreciate your commitment, your patience, and your understanding as we continue to navigate these challenging times and we thank you for all you are doing to keep the children of Maine healthy.

Sincerely,

Adrienne W. Carmack, MD
Medical Director
Office of Child and Family Services